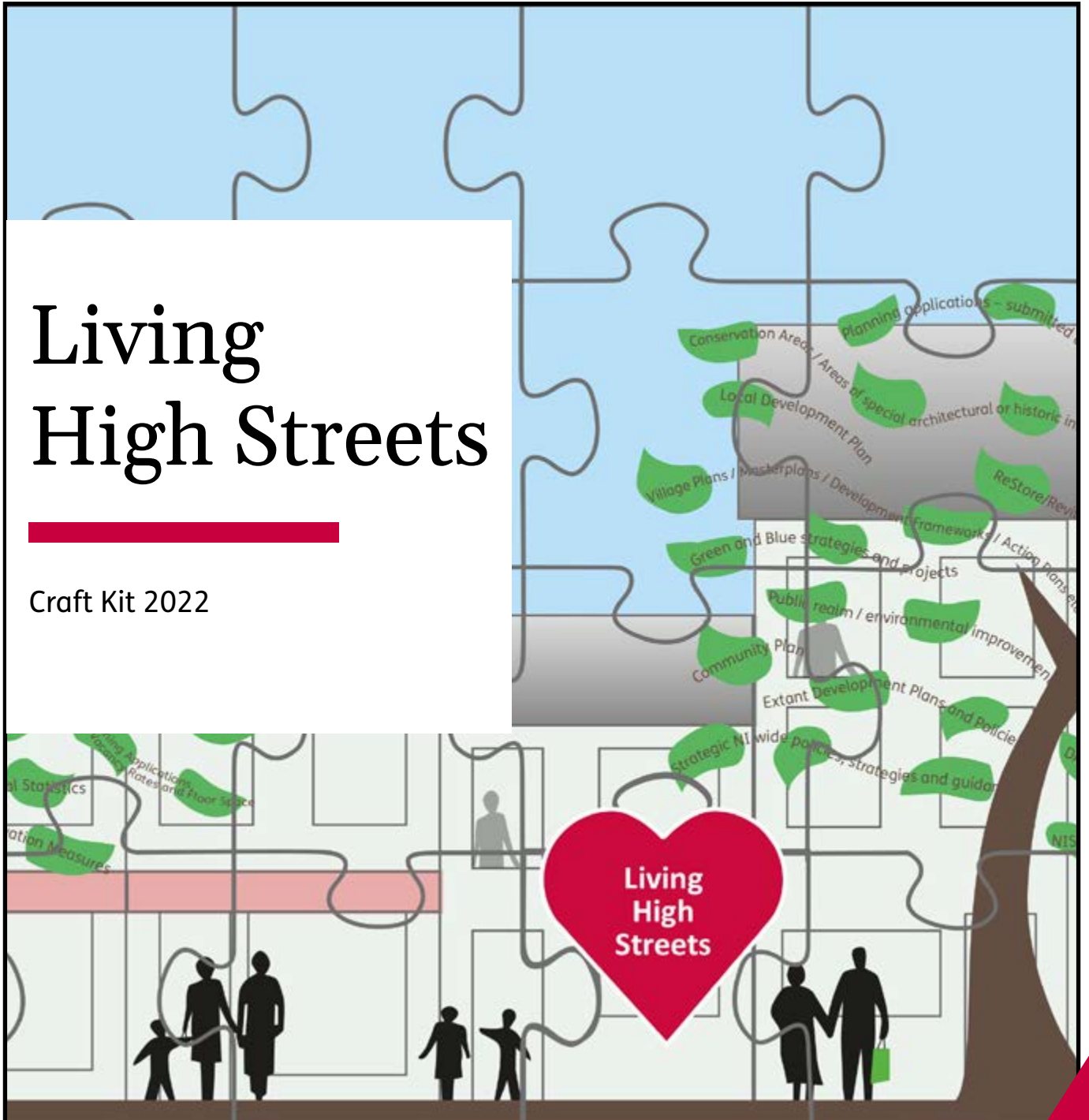




MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP  
ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

# Living High Streets

Craft Kit 2022



Department for  
**Communities**  
[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

An Roinn  
**Pobal**

Department für  
**Commonities**

# Minister's Foreword

I am committed to working together to put people at the centre of the Living High Street where better ways of living in places can be explored and discussed in a manner that respects everyone's aspirations.



The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment has developed this Living High Streets Craft Kit as a resource to help communities develop a shared

understanding of their needs and assets.

This supports my Department's purpose of Supporting People, Building Communities and Shaping Places.'

In response to the challenges faced by traditional high streets, successful places must be underpinned by community wellbeing and supported by multiple layers of activities and resources. Successful places are always safe and accessible; they always encourage healthy active travel, adapt their buildings and spaces sustainably and protect their local natural environments. They are beautiful places that communities love and take care of.

Change starts when everyone comes together to begin doing things. Tactical or pop up approaches can make this immediate and experimental, providing people with opportunities to share experiences, try things out and work together on practical improvements.

This Craft Kit helps translate such ideas into practical actions.

It is a fresh approach to placemaking that supports and challenges communities to work together and ask important questions about all aspects of their places.

These community insights will be vital sources of ideas and visions, to be drawn on in creating the new policies and approaches that are required to address the challenges of crucial issues like climate change as we seek to put quality design at the heart of our placemaking. I hope that this important craft kit can be used as a valuable resource and its full potential realised.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deirdre Harghey".

**Minister for Communities**

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# Prologue

The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland has a vital role in supporting the future success of our villages, towns and cities, with high streets central to that challenge.

While the definition and roles of ‘high streets’ have changed over the centuries, the idea that they are the heart of our places has endured. Reviving the spirit of our high streets can only come from communities reimagining sustainable ways of living together.

MAG has co-designed a fresh approach to placemaking in our Living High Streets. This is not a design guide or template to rejuvenate high streets. It is a fresh approach to placemaking that challenges communities to work together through a series of questions about all aspects of their place. The desired output from these conversations will be a co-designed Living High Streets Framework, underpinned by local knowledge, agreed priorities and means of delivery. The emerging Living High Streets will reflect the purpose and meaning each community envisions for themselves.

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# Living High Streets

## PART ONE - Approach to Living High Streets



# Approach to Living High Streets

Historically, high streets have been the most important public spaces in our urban settlements, developing around the defensive, legal, religious, trading and administrative roles that have naturally brought people together.

High streets became the nerve centre for places, supplying a rich mix of functions, facilities and services that supported their residential communities, wider rural districts and visitors. They were the ‘seed of places’, holding meaning for people by reflecting their unique identity, underlying landscape, roles and culture.

This portrayal reflects places and their high streets in their best light. However, places are inequitable for many people in a variety of ways, which has negative implications for everybody’s prospects. Languishing places which are visibly down-at-heel discourage investment, new people and visitors. This in turn embeds unsustainable practices that are often hard to break.

These issues have been decades in the making and are most obvious in high streets and town centres. Significant factors in their decline have been an over focus on retail, loss of services and saturation of the public realm with cars and parking leaving many places looking like ‘Anytown’. People increasingly look elsewhere

for their services, facilities and shopping, which includes online.

With these changes, places have gradually lost their meaning, causing the traditional and natural bonds between people and places to disintegrate. Re-establishing them as places of choice depends upon the successful re-tying of these bonds. That does not mean ‘bouncing back to better times’ but moving forward with an informed understanding of the people-place connection. The best location to start this change is in the centre; in the high streets themselves where communities have always come together to share their culture, build relationships and trade. This requires a whole place approach that involves everybody.

MAG have developed this fresh approach to Living High Streets with a Craft Kit to guide and support communities to share an understanding of their needs, make the most of existing assets and strip out the things that negatively affect them. Because places shape lives, the Craft Kit poses twenty-one simple but challenging

questions to guide conversations about shaping the future high street. The desired output from these conversations will be a co-designed Living High Street Framework that enables:

- Continued collective involvement
- Inclusive, cultural activities and events
- Movement, public realm and environmental initiatives
- Existing and new masterplans
- Development and restoration projects
- Incorporation of fresh ideas
- Ongoing stewardship

This approach recognises that places and people are ever-changing and will equip local communities with the ability to make this a sustainable and rewarding process. The Craft Kit is designed to be accessible, inclusive and adaptable to all places with the aspired outcome of supporting people throughout their lives. This will require communities to revisit the questions periodically, involve new people, review their Living High Streets Framework and refresh the management structures of their Local Action Group. There is also potential to grow the initiative into ‘big conversations’ about the wider town, city or rural district.

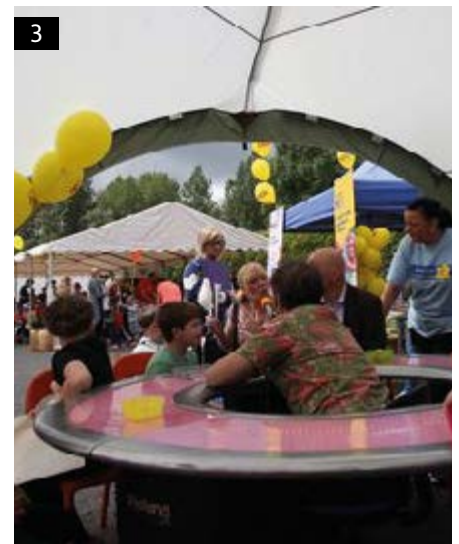
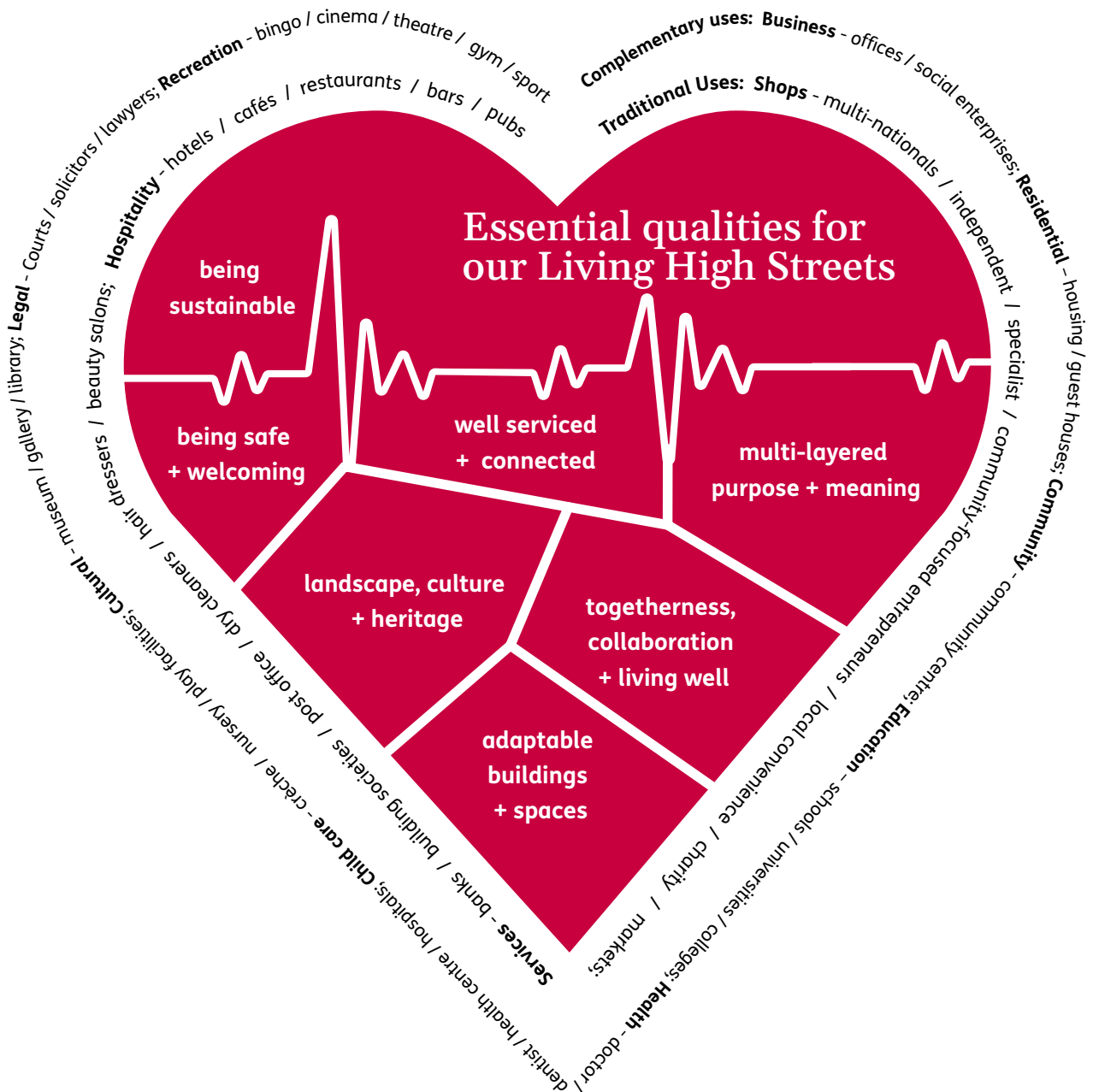


Photo Captions: 1. KidsSpace event engaging children and young people in Placemaking, St Anne's Square, Belfast; 2. Live entertainment at the Harmony Hub, Ballymena; 3. Talkeoke engagement, Colin Urban Village; 4. Causeway Speciality Market, Coleraine; 5. Enjoying the Living High Street, Lisburn Square

# Essential Qualities of Living High Streets

Living High Streets will be resilient to the natural ups-and-downs of changing events, including economic downturns, pandemics and climate change.





The communities in these thriving places will come to know where the tipping-point lies and strive to remain on the right side of that by considering the social, economic and environmental aspects of their place. This is sustainability at its simplest.

Change is a natural process that can bring success or uncertainty. When it brings uncertainty, it threatens resources, making the future difficult to predict. In places where people feel resources are already diminished, individuals, businesses and authorities can tend towards caution and be resistant to change – they get stuck.

When developing this approach to Living High Streets, MAG asked contributors to share their feelings about their favourite high streets – what were their essential qualities? Feedback included childhood and holiday memories; hometowns where people chose to live; novels and films; and some, an imaginary mixture of all these experiences.

Think of your favourite high streets. Hold the feelings they evoke in your mind as you consider their essential qualities. You will discover successful places have a unique ‘spirit of place’ and are built on, and support:

- The local landscape, culture and heritage – the heart and soul of the place
- Togetherness, collaboration and living well - the fundamental human need to be together
- Being safe and welcoming - a public realm of streets and spaces, which are safe and well connected
- Multi-layered purpose and meaning

- Having adaptable buildings and spaces
- Being well serviced and connected - accessible services and facilities
- Being sustainable - social, environmental and economic

When we think about contemporary high streets, we do not have these essential qualities at the forefront of our minds. If the high street has what we want, we will visit, but otherwise we will not. This creates a narrow definition of high streets, which is often as simple as the shops either side of a road. However, they cannot survive when reduced to this level of simplicity. Successful high streets rely on a network of other streets and spaces for:

- Access and servicing
- Complementary traders, facilities and services
- People visiting, working and living there

Developing Living High Streets that better serves its community therefore requires us to look at it as a neighbourhood with soft edges, strong connections to other parts of the place and the ability to satisfy a range of community needs. Thinking about the high street as a neighbourhood brings these essential qualities of place to the fore. In smaller places, the simpler high streets may encompass the whole centre. In larger places the high street and their range of activities increases, often with more than one high street. Regardless of scale, the role of the high street with its complex mix of activities, must be equitably managed to be functional and attractive for everyone.

Additional guidance can be found in **Living Places: An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland**. It aims to clearly show the key principles behind good place making. It looks to inform and inspire all those involved in the process of managing (stewardship) and making (design) urban places, with a view to raising standards across Northern Ireland.

### **Landscape, culture and heritage**

From fishing ports to market towns, the landscape has shaped places, their culture and heritage. Essential to a successful place is its character and culture which comes from its natural and built environment. These qualities give a place its personality and can relate to the design and layout of the streets and spaces, scale and continuity of built frontages, historic buildings and the landscape setting.

It is easy to overlook the importance of these elements in a rapidly changing world but increasing concerns with global environmental issues have made these changes local. Pollution and climate change cause the loss of trees, biodiversity and flooding - all negatively affect everyone's wellbeing. By conserving past culture and heritage through better considered actions, we will also be accumulating and creating positive culture and heritage assets for future generations.

### **Togetherness, collaboration and living well**

Traditionally, people lived their entire lives in and around high streets as a matter of choice. Evidence continues to show that people benefit from living close to essential amenities and services that only urban centres can offer, including the opportunity to meet easily and connect with others as neighbours. This is especially true for older and more vulnerable residents. We need to make town living a positive choice for people of all ages with wellbeing central to policy and plan making. Establishing a collaborative ethos across all communities in the high street will enable the establishment of a sustainable neighbourhood with the success of the high street at its heart. Such a shared mission will support togetherness and enable people to live well in all stages of their lives.

### **Being safe and welcoming**

Attracting people back into central areas to live requires the creation of safe environments that are accessible and inclusively designed. Walking, cycling and reliable public transport is good for the environment, health and community wellbeing. These will form the essential foundations for growing new urban communities, while at the same time attracting and supporting everyone else who visits the Living High Street. Champions and ambassadors can play an important part in making Living High Streets welcoming for visitors and locals alike.



Photo Captions: 1. Spring flowers, Comber Square; 2. Working creatively together at the Artisan Market, Downpatrick; 3. Historic street, Carlingford; 4. “Back-in-Bangor” shop-eat-enjoy week; 5. Opening celebrations, Colin Connect Transport Hub and Colin Town Square, Belfast; 6. Townhall Street, Enniskillen; 7. Promoting active travel, Larne Town Centre

### **Multi-layered purpose and meaning**

The Living High Street offers diverse things for residents, workers and visitors to do and experience, with seamless connections into surrounding streets. Meaning in places grows from positive experiences. These may include being able to set up and work in unique businesses; to buy produce or services exclusive to your town; to enjoy festivals, public art, sports and other civic activities. Together with the unique landscape, culture and heritage, these activities will support the sense of a well-functioning, well-resourced, accessible and inclusive place.

The 'town centres first' policy in the **Strategic Planning Policy Statement** (SPPS) aims to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the right first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions including cultural and community facilities, leisure, entertainment and businesses.

### **Adaptable buildings and spaces**

A thriving Living High Street has good-quality, adaptable buildings and spaces that enable a range of different activities. The importance of quality of the built environment cannot be overstated, whether historical or contemporary; buildings or monuments; lanes, streets and spaces. By preserving their unique characteristics, a distinctiveness that people can relate to forms the spirit of places. Local sustainability issues also include the sustainable re-use of existing buildings instead of replacing them to reduce our carbon

footprint. Also, the re-purposing of existing buildings, other built elements and conservation of the historic elements keeps the form, shape and character of a place.

### **Well serviced and connected**

Living High Streets will be 'smart places', with efficient servicing that accommodates the changing functions of their buildings and spaces. That includes deliveries, refuse collection, home and office removals; street infrastructure for markets and events; public transport stops; secure cycle parking; and street furniture that aids walking. The underlying street scene should be simple and robustly constructed, not dominated by cars nor necessarily pedestrianised. The Living High Street should also be a digitally connected place.

### **Being sustainable - social, environmental and economic**

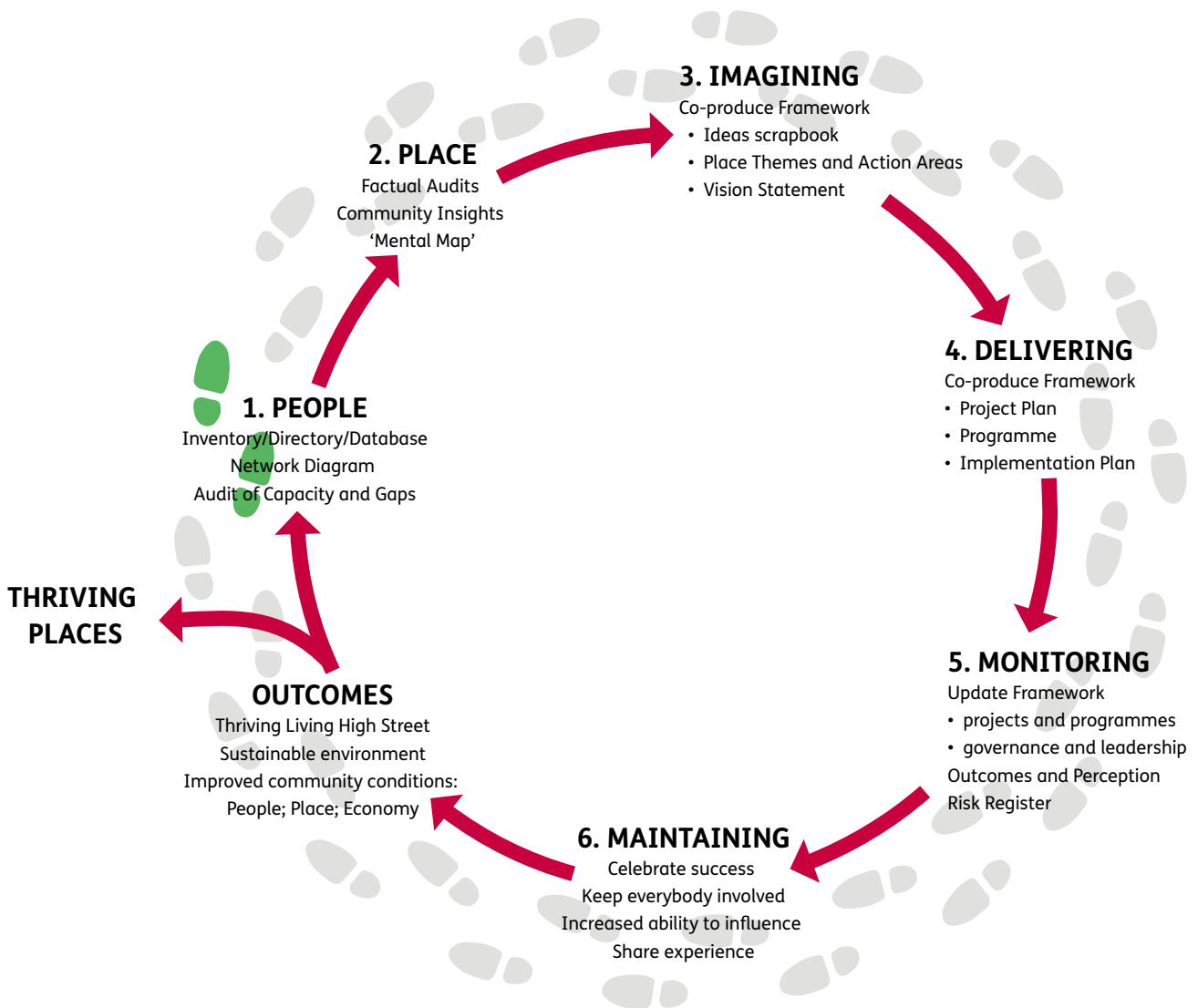
Thinking about sustainability can begin with consideration of the traditional pre-car street layout, the scale of spaces, the shape of the townscape and how it once worked as a network, when people were reliant on active travel and chose to live in town centres. There will be an unfolding story of how the place has grown and become successful, or how it has unravelled. To be sustainable, it is important to see and understand what is working, what adaptability can look like, what needs to be repaired and what must be rejected. The challenge of building Living High Streets will grow from this social, environmental and economic baseline.



Photo Captions: 1. Historic village centre, Richhill; 2. Cyclist on the Ormeau Road, Belfast

# Collaborative Placemaking Approach

Living High Streets serves everyone in the community and therefore everyone should have an opportunity to shape their place.



Living High Streets serves everyone in the community and therefore everyone should have an opportunity to shape their place. This includes public service providers; residents young and old; business owners; employees, schools and colleges; third sector organisations; landlords and investors; and visitors from near and far. Making this achievable requires shared purpose and leadership that works for each individual place. A range of people and organisations could lead and support the process, either as an existing or newly created 'Local Action Group' of doers.

### **A Place Change Model**

MAG have developed a Place Change Model to help communities clarify their aims, build evaluation methods and set up a sustainable cycle of placemaking and stewardship. It provides an opportunity for everybody to be involved in the co-design of their places through six sequential themes that will increase knowledge and skills, build confidence, sense of ownership and most importantly, optimism.

The thematic stages are:

- Theme 1 People:** growing your skills and resources
- Theme 2 Place:** knowing your high street
- Theme 3 Imagining:** what your high street could become
- Theme 4 Delivering:** how to focus and prioritise
- Theme 5 Monitoring:** confirming progress
- Theme 6 Maintaining:** loving your place

The purpose of each theme is explained in the Craftbook along with a series of simple but challenging questions and potential prompts for facilitators to use. It also includes ideas and techniques that allow people to share ideas and thoughts confidentially and without pressure. Thematising and presenting all these collective thoughts builds insights into the deeper community narrative that people are thinking about, rather than the often-narrower story from the strongest voices. The Craftbook also sets out outputs that build sequentially to create the Living High Streets Framework.

Participating in this process has its own value for individual and community wellbeing by promoting optimism. People will gain these benefits at a natural pace and this process cannot be rushed. The idea is for change to spiral upwards, with feedback and evaluation keeping it on track, and continually introducing new people, knowledge and ideas.

## An Inclusive Process

This process is designed to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to meaningfully contribute. The tools in the Craftbook are intended to be used in workshops, both virtual and face to face. The number of workshops will depend on the scale of the place and commitment of the community and there will be activity between thematic workshops. However, only proper resourcing from the outset will deliver the desired long-term sustainable outcomes in every place.

**Councils**

**Residents**

**Statutory bodies**

**Older generations**

**Councillors and MLAs**

**Children and young people**

**Town centre / BID managers**

**3rd sector voluntary groups**

**Businesses and services**

**- owners, operators and investors**

**Local Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

**Service providers - housing, health, education etc.**

**Social enterprises and circular economies**

**Community representatives**

**Department for Communities**

**Heritage - Council Heritage Officer,**

Historic Environment Division,

Historic Buildings

Council, Ulster Architectural Heritage, Local Groups

**Northern Ireland Housing Executive**

**Department for Infrastructure**

For many people, this will be the first time that they have been involved in placemaking discussions. For many professionals, it will also be the first time that they have worked outside of their areas of expertise in open discussions like this. It will be challenging for everybody, which is why expert placemaking facilitators will guide the conversations. The themes and questions in the Place Change Model will supply a structure to these discussions to:

- Create productive conversations that people want to take part in
- Consider the high street from multiple viewpoints
- Think beyond immediate problems to achieve sustainable outcomes; and,
- Move from different views and opinions to consensus

To deliver thriving Living High Streets, communities need to develop an optimistic understanding of what is possible, the means to make it happen and to be involved in its delivery. The purpose of this approach is to highlight the nuance and complexity needed for successful placemaking. It will stop strong voices derailing the process or stifling discussions (e.g., ‘I can’t see that working / being affordable’). It will prevent single-issue solutions (e.g., more parking; pedestrianisation; night-time economy). It will allow the whole community an opportunity to consider all relevant issues. Embedding ‘designerly thinking’ in communities in this way enables democratic participation in the future sustainability of their place.



## Building Social Capital

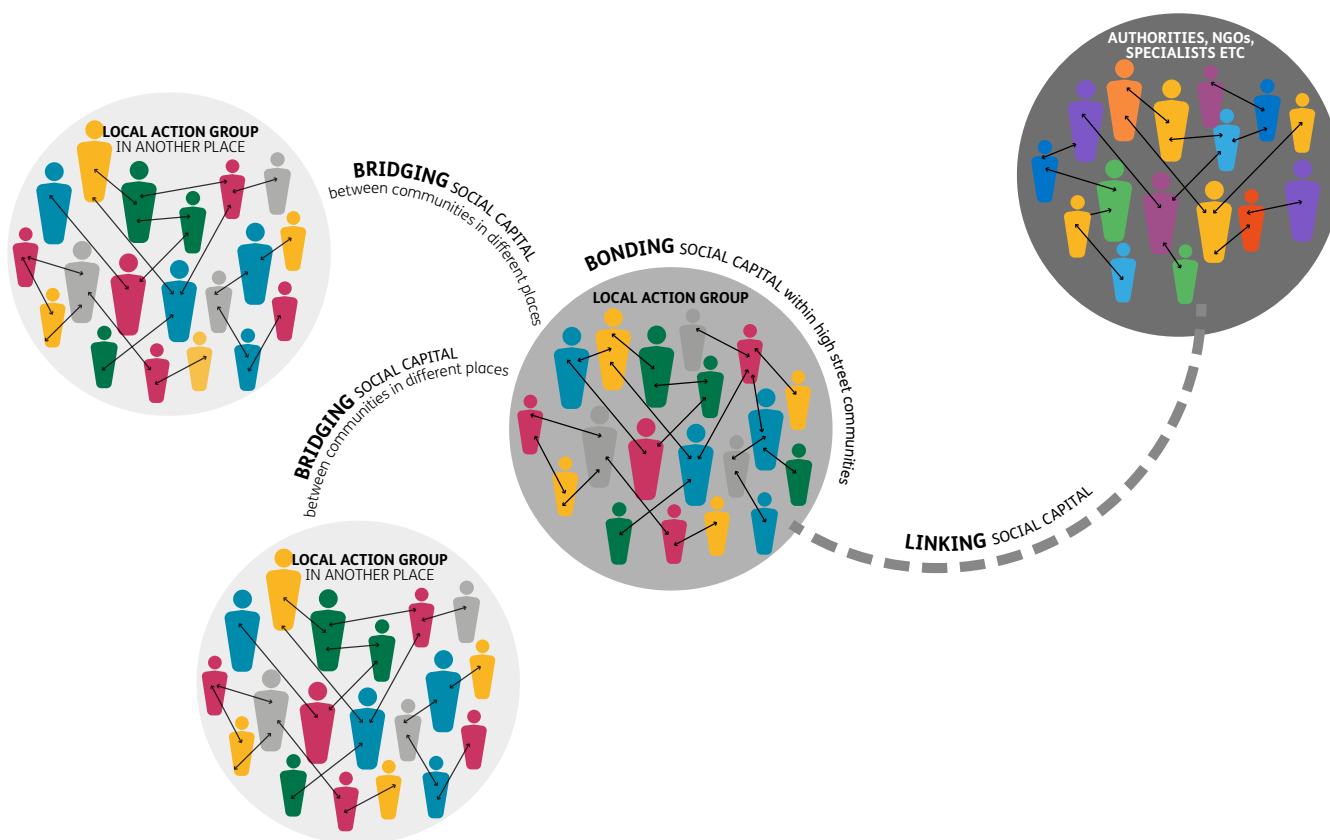
Social capital relates to the network of trusting relationships among people in a place, along with the public realm, buildings and their uses that support those connections. These relationships increase the sharing of experiences, skills and knowledges. The first theme in the Place Change Model is about people, their connections and the nature of their relationships:

**Bonding** – are there any social groups that share a sense of identity, values, trust, cooperation etc?

**Bridging** – do any of these groups connect, cooperate and share their social capital with other groups in different places?

**Linking** – are any of these groups connected to professional organisations, local or national government?

The desired outcome from the Place Change Model is to enable, develop and strengthen these relationships, and to build people's bond with and to their high street by sharing skills, experience and knowledge.



## Developing Leadership - Organisational structures

It is critical that Local Action Groups have a clear sense of ownership and control over the co-production process. MAG has designed this approach to build skills and confidence in communities to enable this. Local Action Groups will be different in each place to reflect their context. A RACI matrix may help each community create the right organisational structure for their Local Action Group:

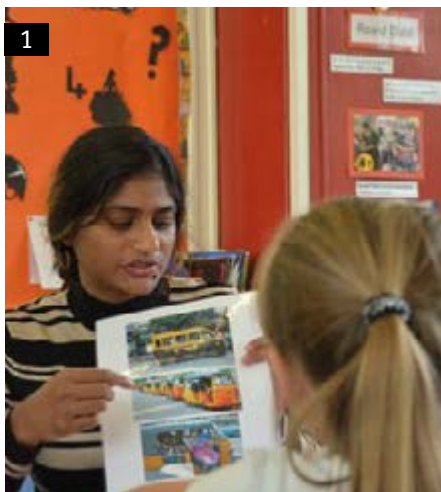
**Responsible:** individual or organisation leading the co-production process.

**Accountable:** individual or organisation accountable for delivering the process. They give permission for it to start or approve the results, delivery and evaluation.

**Contributor:** individual or organisation taking part in the process. They may be a stakeholder or specialist that supports the process with experience and knowledge.

**Informed:** individuals and organisations who need to be made aware of the process and when an activity has important consequences for any of the people involved.

	RESPONSIBLE	ACCOUNTABLE	CONTRIBUTOR	INFORMED
Community representatives	?		X	
		?		
Residents - children and young people to older generations			X	X
Businesses and services – owners, operators, investors				X
				X
3rd sector voluntary groups				X
Service providers (housing, health, education etc.)				X
Department for Communities – Regeneration and Housing Directorate				
Northern Ireland Housing Executive			X	
High Street Task Force (TEO)				



## Initiating Engagement

The Local Action Group will identify existing networks of people and groups, where and when they meet and how they communicate with each other. Local and national government offices, business associations and third sector organisations have lists of relevant groups and their contact information. Local and social media can be used to get things started and involve the wider community.

Consider and ask how these different audiences would prefer to be engaged, and how much time and resource they can put to this. This is particularly important for children, teenagers, older and disabled people who can often be excluded from these initiatives. The wellbeing of

Northern Ireland's children and young people is a key aim of this process and it is important that they are fully involved and their voices heard. Their involvement also presents an educational opportunity. There are several overarching standards for engaging children and young people in the **Placemaking engaging children and young people**. Consider how to overcome any barriers such as language, literacy and neurodiversity. The Local Action Group need to ensure equal opportunity for the nine equality categories in **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**. A range of approaches need to be taken to ensure that no groups are excluded including thoughtful consideration of workshop and meeting venues.

Photo Captions: Urban Villages: 1. School engagement, south Belfast; 2. Expecting something engagement, East Belfast; 3. Talkeoke engagement, Colin; 4. Engagement event, Derry~Londonderry; 5. Stakeholder engagement, Derry~Londonderry

### Nowhere starts from scratch

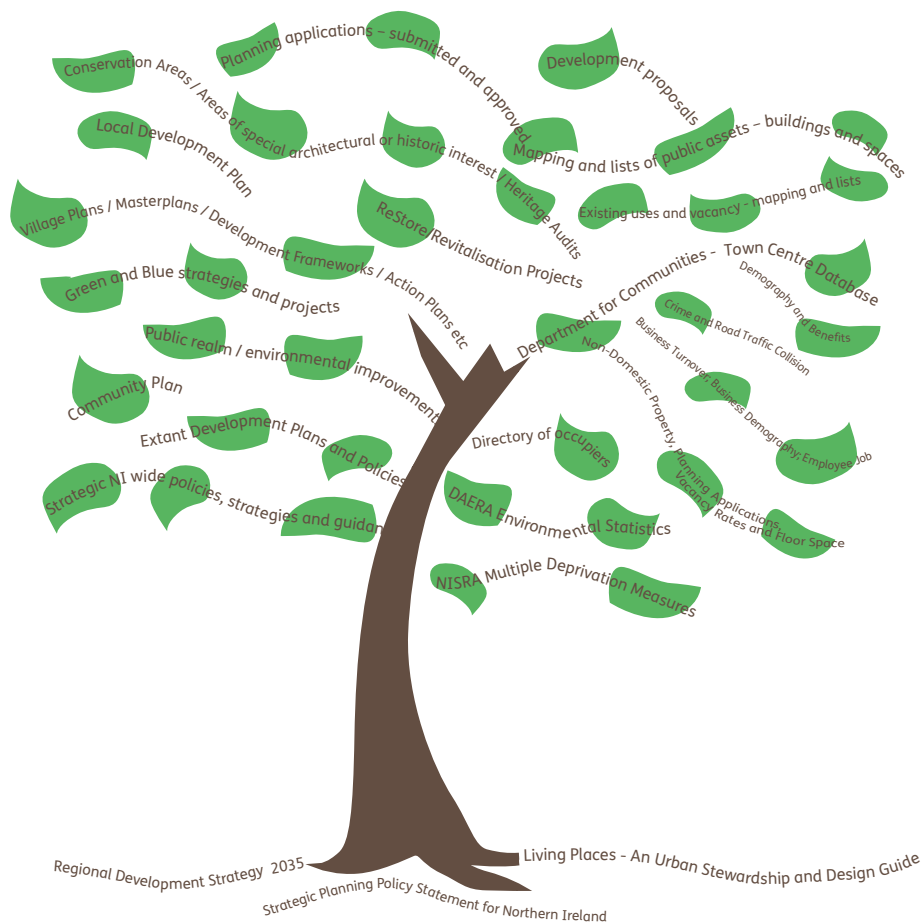
Every place has a history. Individuals, groups and organisations have built a wealth of knowledge, expertise, documents, photographs and connections. There will be extensive official datasets for different social and physical matters, along with planning policies and development plans. The Local Action Group must start pooling this information at once. Local and national government can supply a good foundation along with connections to other sources, such as:

- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
- Local Chamber of Commerce, etc.

It is important to collect relevant up-to-date information and prepare original surveys where

gaps exist. However, have a plan and try not to get bogged down in this appraisal work. Focus only on what is directly relevant. Start by setting up benchmark measures – the things that will be evaluated over time to show progress. Each place is different, and the relevant measures should naturally emerge through the process. There are many audit methods available and collaborating with local authorities and professional advisors will ensure a suitable approach is selected. Potential funding sources should be reviewed to ensure that relevant evidence is being collected to support any future bids.

Policy is developing all the time, which may provide opportunities to review and improve current policies and plans. Advancing ‘right change’ will involve challenging the status quo from time to time to find the best way forward.



# Call to Action

Reviving our places can only come from communities being at the heart of reimagining sustainable Living High Streets. The time is right to take a fresh approach to our high streets and move forward with an informed understanding of the people-place connections. While there are common issues across our villages, towns and city centres, each must reflect its own distinct context in terms of people and place.

The Living High Streets Craft Kit will guide and support communities in developing a shared understanding of their needs, making the most of their existing assets and stripping out the things that negatively affect them. The aim is to enable all places to be thriving and socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. To use it effectively, broad participation will be needed, along with leadership and facilitation by people who understand the placemaking approach.

The Craft Kit emphasises the importance of constant evaluation of the Living High Streets Framework, revisiting and refining it so that the village, town or city centre grows sustainably in the short, medium and long-term. The process will also provide future continuity with a growing sense of local ownership and pride in place.

It is important to acknowledge that the outcomes from the engagement process are valuable for building social capital, where people come together to tackle common concerns. The emerging Living High Streets will reflect the purpose and meaning each community brings to life.

It is acknowledged that this process will require resources, but this may be using existing resources differently and seeking new resources to fill any gaps in skills, knowledge and experience. It is critical that the process is embraced at a regional level across Northern Ireland, and each stage properly supported with local community participation.

Opportunities will emerge through the process to implement 'tactical' or 'pop-up' approaches which are designed to introduce change through an experimental, flexible and inclusive method. These approaches can form part of the Living High Streets process, providing people with opportunities to share their own experiences of their places and to engage them in practical improvements.

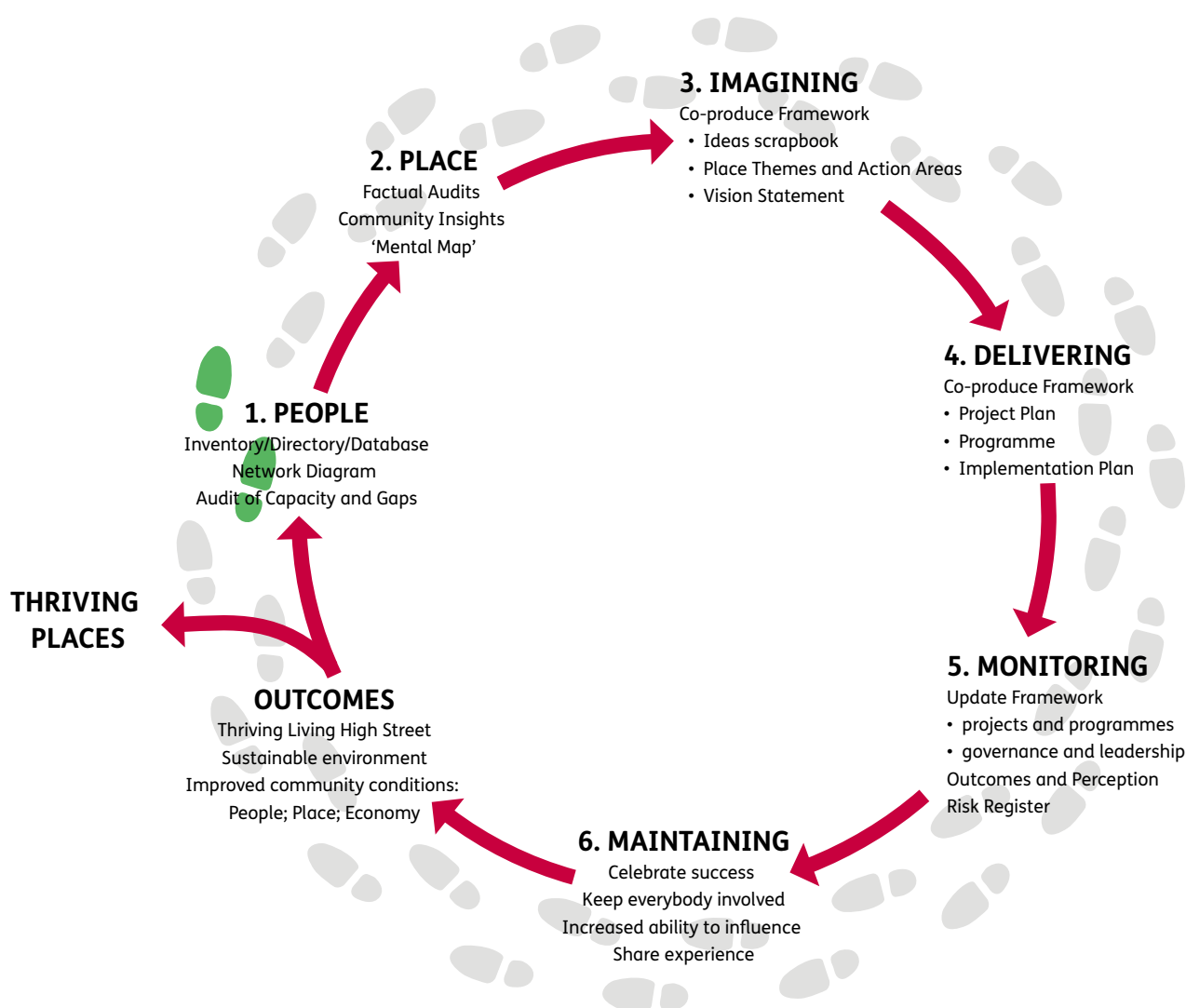
# Living High Streets

## PART TWO - Questions and Considerations



# Co-Producing Your Living High Streets

This Craftbook sets out the placemaking process in detail to guide Local Action Groups and expert facilitators in the co-production of a Living High Streets Framework. The process includes the six themes from the Place Change Model and twenty-one simple but challenging questions for communities with prompts to guide conversations about their future high streets.



The complexity of placemaking will be challenging for everybody, which is why we have devised a method to manage conversations so that everyone has an opportunity to meaningfully contribute. It is based on de Bono's 'Thinking Hats' method which represents different ways of looking at places and can be used to keep conversations alive and stop strong voices derailing the process or stifling wider discussions. We ask Local Action Groups and expert facilitators to keep discussions focussed as follows:

**The White Hat** is concerned with 'collecting facts' which is a neutral beginning to the process which everyone will find easy to contribute to.

**The Red Hat** is concerned with 'feelings' about places, activities or ideas which will be more challenging.

**The Yellow Hat** is concerned with being positive, looking for benefits and imagining what the high street 'could become'?

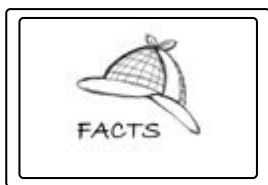
**The Green Hat** is concerned with creative thinking, asking 'what can we do here' and 'what will our place be like?'

**The Blue Hat** is concerned with planning and shaping ideas, asking 'where and how would we make changes?'

**The Black Hat** is concerned with evaluation, resolution, decision making and delivery.

**The Brown Hat** - is concerned with stewardship, valuing, supporting and keeping the living high street relevant.

In practice, if participants are discussing a question focussed on what they know about their place, it would be disruptive to go off on a tangent about design ideas. Similarly, when discussing design ideas, tangents about 'practicability' would also be unhelpful. There will be opportunities to discuss everything in the process which the facilitators should outline at each workshop. It is not intended to use the 'hats' literally but the facilitators should think about which 'hats' fit each question and how the discussion should be focussed. It might be helpful to colour match workshop materials like Post-it notes to the 'hats'.





There are several approaches the Local Action Group can take to pose and work through the questions, which will vary depending on the context, need and resources of each place and stage of the process.

The Local Action Group should start by:

- Information gathering and tasking people to collate existing data.
- Considering questionnaires to collect information and ideas.
- Inviting individuals and groups to walk around their places to undertake original surveys.
- Considering the best way to engage with communities:
  - Interviews can be conducted and include audio and video recording.
  - Web searches can be made to collate ideas.
  - People meet and participate in workshops.

The workshops are where the conversations will primarily take place, and all the information and ideas gathered through the other approaches should always be available to them. An essential part of the process is the accumulation of knowledge and the sharing of points of view.

It is a snapshot in time and the issues raised will be central to everyone's lives. As the process unfolds, people should feel:

- Greater responsibility for their place.
- Increasing confidence and control.
- Growing optimism.

Running workshops is a key part of the process. However, placemaking discussions are novel for most people and not everyone will want to attend meetings straight away.

It is therefore important to tailor the approach to match diverse communities. It might be right for special interest groups, schools, older people etc to run independent workshops, so long as everything comes together in a single conversation as part of that theme.

The following is a guiding structure for the workshops, setting out advice and key requirements:

- Display all background information in the room.
- Introduce the overall process and purpose of each workshop to the whole gathering.
- Work in groups of six (8 maximum) with one facilitator per two groups.
- While discussing the questions, ask participants to record every idea separately on Post-it notes in a few words - it could be useful to match their colour to the Thinking Hats.
- Keep reminding people to record their thoughts continuously in the session, being mindful that some may need help. This can be written, drawn or spoken.

- Do not be afraid of silences – it is an opportunity to ask people to write their thoughts down and think about what others have said.
- If the conversation stalls, use the suggested prompts – but keep the facilitation light-touch and try not to lead. Participants need to grow as a group and not look to the facilitator for ‘permission’.
- At the end of an exercise and session, ask groups to share their thoughts with the room. During this conversation, again ask participants to continue noting their thoughts down.
- After the session, facilitators should thematise all the captured thought and assemble them on a display.
- The next session should be at least a week later to allow people to digest what they have learned from each other.
- At the next session, display the thematised work on a ‘canvas’ and ask people to spend time looking at it. Open with a discussion on what they feel about it and would want to add – remember which hat it relates to and add to that theme.
- Conversations will move off subject from time to time, especially looking back on earlier sessions. Record those thoughts and add to right subject before getting back on track. This is when the ‘hats’ become useful.
- People may have sent photos with comments via social media invitations, taken them on walking workshops or brought back to sessions after thinking about what they did at an earlier one. Thematise these too and add them to the Post-it displays.

Additional guidance can be found in **‘Healthy Places, Healthy Children’** to guide work with young people. It is a useful set of tools built around Key Stage 2 produced by Belfast Healthy Cities in collaboration with the Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Education Authority.

Some ideas will bring challenges that are common to many high streets. Opportunities may come from cultural and habitual changes that the Local Action Group can encourage locally. Others may require policy, funding or legislative changes, or other external intervention. It is likely that ‘linking social capital’ by reaching out to the NI High Street Task Force, local or central government, Non -Government Organisations (NGOs) or specialists could help. There may also be some opportunities for ‘bridging social capital’ by asking for advice from other Local Action Groups in different places.

# Theme One

## People: growing your skills and resources



Photo Captions: Urban Villages: 1. Talkeoke engagement, Colin; 2. Engagement, East Belfast; 3. Talkeoke engagement, Colin; 4. Talkeoke engagement, Colin; 5. Stakeholder engagement

## **Purpose: Building social capital around Living High Streets**

The aim is to involve as many people as possible, including residents, businesses, service providers, stakeholders and the authorities responsible for the administration of places. This is the first step to building social capital, with opportunities for different communities of interest to connect, see the high street through each other's eyes, get an idea of how it affects their lives and what it means to them. It is important that no group or individual dominates the conversations.

### **Outcomes and Outputs**

This stage should build relationships and trust.

Anticipated results will include:

- **Insights** into what the high street means to different people.
- **Inventory** of individuals and groups interested in, connected to and using the high street regularly.
- **Network diagram** of formal and informal connections between various parts of the community.
- **Audit of capacity** – skills, knowledge, experience and availability.
- **Highlighting gaps** where capacity building will be needed.

Formally record all this information and keep it updated throughout the process.

## **Ways of working together**

Meeting with groups and individuals to discuss the questions gives an opportunity to introduce the Living High Street process and begin connecting people together around a joint initiative. Working through this theme will help people understand the skills and capacity they may not recognise they have. It will show them how and where they can make positive contributions to the process.

The Local Action Group may wish to develop their own questionnaires. Social media is an effective way of connecting, linking and gathering information through questionnaires. It is also useful to go to where people are doing other things:

- Libraries; local history groups; mothers and babies; environmental groups; schools etc.
- Holding pop-up events in the high street and public spaces.
- Exhibiting information in shop windows and public buildings.
- Potentially using vacant shops as temporary project centres.

Different people are likely to want to take part in diverse ways subject to their preferences. Some may just want to be informed and others may choose to volunteer for specific tasks that they have a talent for. At this stage we are simply looking to understand people's differences and to share them across the community. This is about building trust. In the Place Theme, we will look at how to build consensus.

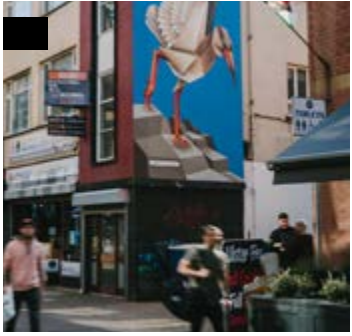


Photo Captions: 1. Local services and facilities, Ballyhackamore, Belfast; 2. Family friendly streets, Carlingford; 3. Celebrating differences, Entries public art, Belfast; 4. Shop local, Ballyhackamore, Belfast; 5. Accessibility for all - Belfast Healthy Cities walk assessment of Belfast City Centre with RNIB

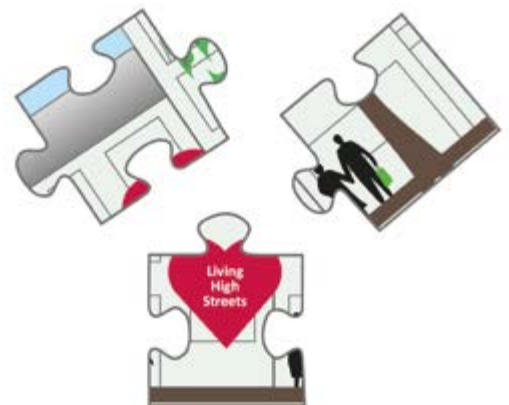
## Question 1: Who is your high street for?

A successful Living High Street should serve everybody's needs. Thinking about the wider community, build a picture of who uses the high street and who it could serve.

### Additional Prompts

- What do they do there – work, shop, play, meet, eat, learn, live, relax etc.
- When do they use it?
- Are there certain times of the day or week that more people use it?
- Does it serve all their needs?
- Where do they live and how do they get there?
- How well do they mix and fit in together?
- Who is not involved now – do they not feel they belong, is transport an issue or is there nothing for them?

Keep in mind the vulnerable and those with protected characteristics, children and young people, residents, workers, business owners, service providers, visitors and even people passing through.



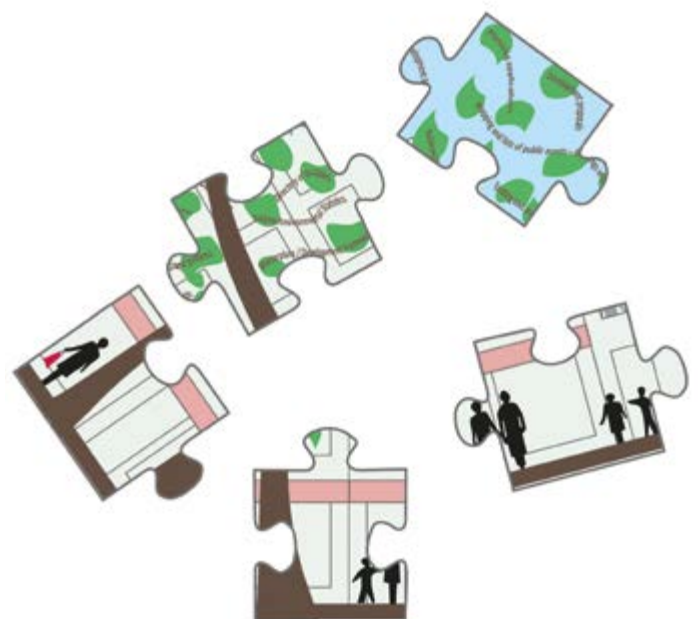
## Question 2: How do we involve people?

The process will encourage natural expansion of community networks as word spreads, connections are made, and the number and diversity of participants increases. Consider how this process can be improved and reach people that are often overlooked.

### Additional Prompts

- What groups and networks already exist?
- How and where do people come together?
- Who is not involved now?
- Are there local social media or digital platforms already set up?
- What events and activities are planned that could provide a link to communities?
- What are the potential barriers to diverse groups?
- Do we need to offer incentives – food, speakers, funding for social media etc?

Start developing an inventory and network diagram of connections with the participants and publicise it as it grows.



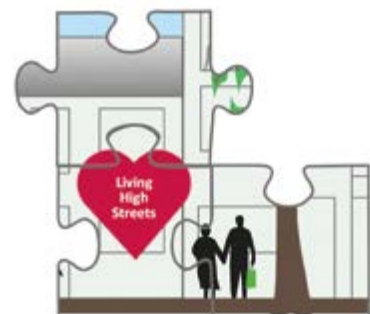
### Question 3:

## How do we better connect people to their high streets?

Successful Living High Streets provide communities with what they need to thrive which makes being able to connect to it an important consideration. However, connecting to the high street can mean different things to different people. It can range from the nostalgic to physical, social, economic and increasingly digital. Consider how different connections can be set up and improved.

### Additional Prompts

- Do people have historic connections to the place?
- Do people have a say in their place, and can they contribute if they choose to?
- Where do people meet and are they attractive and safe places?
- Are businesses connected to the community?
- Are businesses connected to each other?
- Is there a digital directory, local website, Facebook page to connect to community groups, services, activities and businesses?
- Is it easy to get to your high street?
- Is lack of good transport or its cost a barrier?
- Is the public realm walkable and accessible?
- Are there cycling facilities and secure parking?





## Question 4: What skills and experience do we have?

Every community will have a huge amount of skill, knowledge and experience, although people may not appreciate their value or how they can be shared in the development their Living High Streets. The Local Action Group may wish to use tools like Capacity Check or develop their own questionnaires to address this question.

### Additional Prompts

- What skills do you have that are relevant to your high street?
- Can you draw; photograph; make things; record; film etc?
- Can you inspire others to take part?
- Skills include Leadership; Organisation; Design; Creativity; Placemaking; Environmental; Business; Volunteering; Local and historic knowledge; Digital etc.
- Do you know anyone with relevant skills and experience that could be involved?
- What time can you commit to - this will change and may be seasonal; relate to school times; little and often; weekends; potential secondment etc.



## Question 5:

### Where do we find the skills and talents we are missing?

The audit coming out of the last question will have begun highlighting the resources that are missing or need strengthening. Build this list of gaps in the audit and think about how to deal with them.

#### Additional Prompts

- What is missing?
- What needs strengthening?
- Do we have skills and ability to set up a training programme?
- Do we have mentors in the community?
- Can schools and colleges help?
- Who can help (bridging and linking capital)?
- Can we share resources with other places?
- Can we learn from other communities?
- Do we need short term expertise - should we employ someone?
- How do we build succession into the process?

To continuously strengthen capacity, it will be important to return to this question regularly and update the responses.



# Theme Two

## Place: knowing your high street



Photo Captions: 1. Belfast Healthy Cities photovoice wall; 2. Belfast Healthy Cities walk assessment of Belfast City Centre with Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB); 3. Better Bedford Street engagement in pop up space, Belfast; 4. Community engagement event, North Belfast Urban Village; 5. Better Bedford Street walkabout, Belfast

## **Purpose: Building a shared understanding of your high street through local knowledge, perceptions and audits of existing assets and activities**

Everyone has a different view of their place, and it is important to explore these openly to ensure everyone is talking about the same place when they say 'the High Street'. The aim is to share information, knowledge and feelings to understand what the high street means to different people and to build a picture of the essential qualities of each place. There are many good practice approaches to collating this material. However, it is important to cherish the individuality and uniqueness of places so that we develop 'right practice' for each Living High Street.

Living High Streets are diverse and serve a range of community needs. They are more than a row of shops, and the Local Action Group needs to treat them as neighbourhoods with soft edges.

### **Outcomes and Outputs**

This theme focusses on sharing knowledge and judgements to build a consensus on the high street **today**. It is important that this picture is mapped out to ensure that everyone has the same place in mind. Anticipated results will include:

- A range of **Factual Audits** on the physical place, its history, activities, connectivity, health and economy.
- A **Community Insights** report on how the high street supports people and is perceived by them.

- A **Mental Map** of the high street, illustrating its edges, adjoining neighbourhoods and connections to the wider place.

### **Ways of working together**

This theme is about sharing, considering and discussing people's different knowledge, values and feeling about their high street. It is also about agreeing a set of high-level shared goals that address community needs. The Local Action Group can post the questions on social media, canvas ideas in the street, public buildings and at events, as well as working with different ingroups such as schools, clubs, older person communities etc. However, it is the intention that these questions will be presented at facilitated workshops with participants walking the streets recording their observations and thoughts before discussing them together in groups. All observations and thoughts from other sources should be available and included in the community discussion.

The questions fall into two parts which requires a minimum of two public workshops. The first eases people into the process with a neutral sharing of information about the high street and thoughts about its sustainability – questions 6-8. This work will be thematised and presented to the next workshop. The second can be more challenging and asks people to share their feelings about their place, think about shared goals and draw up a map defining the Living High Street neighbourhood – questions 9-11. There should be a minimum of a week between these two workshops to allow people to consider what they have learned from each other.

## Question 6:

### What do you know about your high street?

This question is primarily about factual things. Walk around the high street making individual notes on Post-its or recording sound bites about the things you see and think are important to bring back to a group discussion. Take photographs too and caption them. In workshop groups, sketch out a map that illustrates where these things are.

#### Additional Prompts

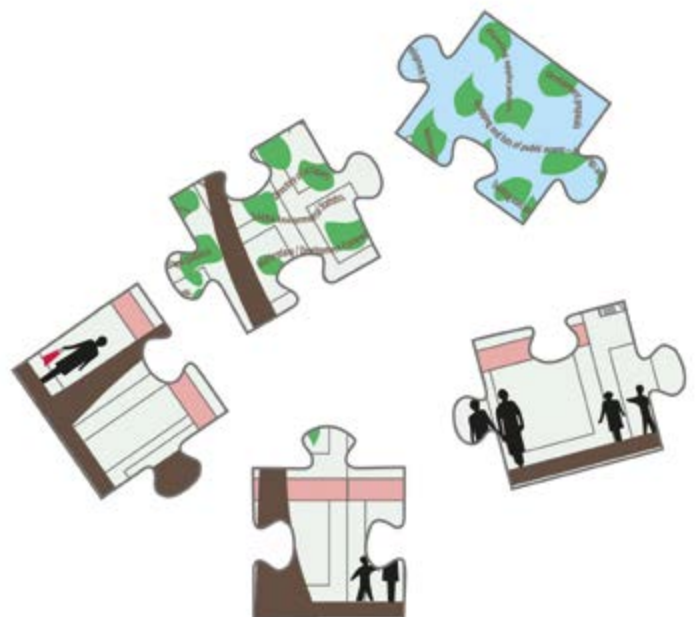
- What do you think are the essential qualities here?
- What make this place distinctive?
- Buildings – quality type, size, style and condition.
- Buildings uses – are upper floors different?
- What kind of shops and service - are there other types of businesses?
- Are there any health services, dentists, opticians etc?
- Recreation and leisure including community activities and clubs.
- Living on the high street – houses, apartments and living over the shop.
- Public spaces – quality, type, size, facilities and uses.
- Is there an outdoor market – how does it work?
- Heritage – what has changed?
- Streets – pedestrianised, one-way, busy/quiet, width, parking etc.
- Pavements – quality, accessible, width, cluttered, well lit, trees etc.
- Facilities - cycle lanes/parking, bus stops, benches, public toilets etc.
- Are there barriers to movement – busy roads, pedestrian guard rails, pavement parking etc?
- Maintenance – litter, bins, graffiti, building condition etc.
- Opening hours of businesses and public buildings.
- Do you think that this is an inclusive place – think about gender, disability, younger and older people?

## Question 7: How and why do people use your high street?

This question is about habits and opinions. While many responses will be neutral and factual (I work here), this is the place to share opinions too (I like that shop).

### Additional Prompts

- Why do you go to town, how often and what do you do when you are here?
- What do you like about your high street?
- Where is your favourite place to go and why?
- How do you get to the high street – walk, cycle, bus, car, train, taxi?
- Do you have a preferred route - would you use the same route after dark?
- Is there a good pedestrian network?
- Are there leisure facilities – cinemas, swimming pools, tennis courts etc?
- What do you think is missing – think beyond retail?
- Why do you think people are not visiting or using the high street – who are they?
- What are locals and visitors looking for?
- Are there festivals and other events celebrated here?
- Are there free things to take part in?
- What impact do visitors and tourists have?



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## Question 8:

### To what extent is your high street socially, environmentally and economically 'sustainable'?

This open question intended to raise awareness and initiation discussion on forms of sustainability relevant to the high street. This discussion could form the basis of a community sustainability plan.

#### Additional Prompts

- Environment – what do we know about our landscape; biodiversity; water and air quality etc?
- Social – what do we know about connections and relationships; equity; diversity; liveability; quality of life; wellbeing; health etc?
- Economy – what do we know about the diversity of uses and opportunities; availability and quality of commercial space; business success; employment etc?
- What data do we have?
- Are there any policies for our place?
- Is public transport and active travel well supported?
- Are we promoting green energy use and reducing our carbon footprint?
- Are we making the most of embodied energy – supporting, restoring and repurposing existing buildings and structures?
- Are we reducing waste and recycling effectively?
- Do we have experts among us – professionals; bird watchers etc; community groups; heritage groups; up-cyclers; and schools and youth groups etc.?
- Are we developing a circular economy?
- Do you have community food growing or orchards?

## Question 9: What do you 'feel' about your high street?

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a feeling and an opinion. Believing that the high street needs more shops (an opinion) is different from feeling the emptiness of a high street (a feeling). This question is about emotional responses. How people 'feel' affects behaviours, choices and wellbeing, which in turns affects the whole community.

Carry this exercise out in the streets. Do not 'think' too hard but walk around noting your immediate responses to what you see and experience.

### Additional Prompts

- Do you feel welcome?
- Do you feel like you belong here?
- What do you feel about the people here?
- Do the seasons change your feelings about the place?
- How did you feel about this place in the past?
- Memories - what was the best time you spent here?
- Reminiscence - what was it like before, how has it changed and where do you think it is going?
- Do you feel safe here?
- Do you feel safe here at night?
- Do you feel your children or parents would be safe here?
- Does this place feel successful?

It might be important to collect visitor perceptions which can be done through a simple questionnaire.





## Question 10: How do we agree shared goals?

Living High Streets bring everybody together to meet many of their various needs, day and night, across the year. With such a complex role, they can easily become congested places which need good management to ensure they stay functional and attractive for everyone.

This question is about agreeing a set of high-level shared goals that address community needs. These goals will inform the necessary indicators which will need to be revisited, monitored and developed throughout the process.

### Additional Prompts

- What are your goals for the Living High Street as a shopkeeper, café owner, children and young people, older generation, visitors, office workers, residents, hairdresser etc?
- What are the 'essential qualities' of our Place?
- Landscape, culture and heritage - the 'seed' and 'soul' of the place.
- Togetherness, collaboration and living well - the fundamental human needs to be together.
- Being safe and welcoming – an accessible public realm.
- Multi-layered sense of purpose and meaning.
- Adaptable buildings and spaces.
- Well serviced and connected.
- Being sustainable - social, environmental and economic.
- How do we protect the essential qualities here?



## **Question 11:** **Where and what is your high street?**

Create a **Mental Map** of your high street neighbourhood. Start with people drawing and sharing the map in their mind to understanding different views. Go outside as a group and walk around to consider the different things that should go into the map. It is important that this map should be a freehand diagram rather than an exact plan. This is because this will show how people perceive their place and relationships between things in their high street. This exercise will illustrate what is important to people and their perception of distance between places.

Think of the high street as a neighbourhood and consider all the things that add up to why you visit or live around the high street. Also think about how it might change shape at night, through the seasons or during festivals – these are the reason the edges need to be soft.

### **Additional Prompts**

- Where is the core of your high street and the neighbourhood that supports it?
- Where are the edges of the areas that are different from it – it's ok for there to be an uncertain 'gap' between them!
- What are the main routes through and the connections out?
- Building edges (active or blank) and landmarks (may be in the distance)
- Street and pedestrian network, meeting points and spaces
- Cycling routes and facilities.
- Market and festival spaces
- Public transport – where are the routes, stations or stops
- Landscape features like gardens, parks, rivers and important views.
- Main uses and attractions in the buildings and spaces.
- Empty sites and derelict buildings.
- Any negatives like smell, noise, danger, ugliness, boring, barriers etc

While the map should be simple, it must illustrate all the important parts and meaningful aspects of the neighbourhood.

# Theme Three

## Imagining: what your high street could become



Photo Captions: 1. Community engagement event, North Belfast Urban Village; 2. Capturing discussions in Wordclouds; 3. Belfast Healthy Cities Take A Bus drawing, Extract from A Plan Fit for Children: 2017; 4. Children's event at Artisan Market in the courtyard of Down Museum, Downpatrick; 5. Engagement event, South Belfast Urban Village

## **Purpose: Creatively producing ideas of what your high street could become, what it will look like and how it might evolve**

The main objective is to produce and test ideas to deliver a 'Living High Street', giving an opportunity for everyone to share their aspirations and discuss their needs.

The Local Action Group should expect and tolerate natural contradictions and differing interest throughout this process because Living High Streets serve many functions. This process allows the net to be cast wide for ideas and thinking, followed by reasoned conversations to arrive at a consensus on what needs and can be done. The process encourages 'designerly' thinking, recognising that this collaborative process is not time barred. The aim of these questions is to get people to think differently and constructively about the future of their high street.

### **Outcomes and Outputs**

This theme focusses on sharing ideas and developing a consensus on key themes and action areas to be taken forward into a Vision for the Living High Street. Anticipated results will include:

- An **Ideas Scrapbook** assembled out of the first thoughts and conversations on what makes a good place.
- Agreed key **Place Themes** with a statement for each one and identified **Action Areas** marked on the high street map.
- A **Vision Statement** supported by broad long-term 'Goals' and more focussed 'Objectives' based on conversations of what the high street could become.

### **Ways of working together**

This theme is about being creative with ideas. Following the format in the People Theme, the Local action Group can post the questions on social media, canvas ideas in the street, public buildings and at events, as well as working with separate groups. However, again, it is the intention that these questions be presented at facilitated community workshops and incorporating ideas from other groups. These questions fall into two parts which requires a minimum of two public workshops.

The first workshop is designed to get participants thinking positively about their place - questions 12-13. While it can seem useful to show good examples of other places, it is likely to be better for group members to bring their own ideas and build their own interest and expertise of places. Having internet access in workshops will enable people to look for examples of the things they are interested in and be able to discuss them at once with others. This work will be thematised into an **Ideas Scrapbook** and presented to the next workshop.

The second workshop will focus on questions 14-15 to identify key **Place Themes** with a statement for each one, identify **Action Areas**. This workshop will also co-produce a Vision and develop the broad Goals from question 10 along with Objectives. A break of at least a week is recommended between workshops to allow for reflection. This is a further opportunity to see the high street through other people's eyes to get an idea of what they need from it and how it can be developed to meet those needs.

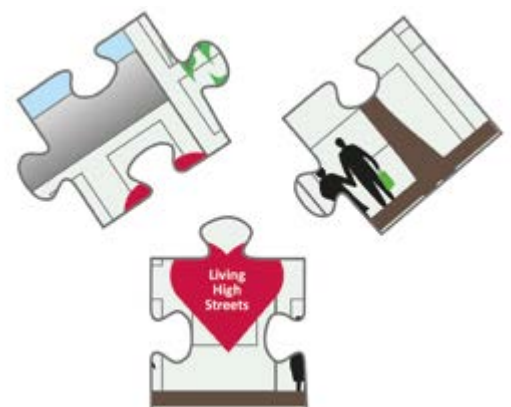
## Question 12: What makes a good high street?

This open question is an invitation to imagine what a good high street would be like and discuss what that means to you. Inspiration could come from places visited, seen on film or imagined. Try to hold the feelings they evoke at the forefront of your mind as you work through all the questions in this theme. Importantly, share and pool these memories with others to generate a collective and unique **spirit of place**.

### Additional Prompts

- What are your favourite high streets and why?
- Try to think about these things more in terms of **needs** before **wants**.
- Think about the needs of different people as well as your own journey through life.
- What makes you feel connected to places?
- What makes one place different to another?
- What do **Living High Streets** mean to you?
- What would make a good place to grow up in and to age well in?
- What about the quality of buildings and streets; spaces and environments; facilities and services; movement and accessibility.

Internet access could be useful to collect images, discussing why they are important and relevant to this place.



## **Question 13:** **What do you like about your high street?**

The key thing is to get a shared awareness of the positive qualities for your place. Again, get out into the streets to remind yourself of what is there and share these thoughts with others.

Discuss and thematise all the ideas from both Question 12 and 13. This is a time to get creative by sketching plans, creating collages, making models and producing a film or audio story.

### **Additional Prompts**

- What makes you proud?
- What do you enjoy?
- What things hold meaning for you?
- Do you have a sense of belonging?
- Think about the little things that trigger memories: shopfronts, smell of baking bread, the friendly chemist, historic faded signs, tree stumps etc.
- Buildings – the architecture or just a door, window or ornament etc.
- Public spaces – seats, trees, ornament etc.
- Views – near and far.
- People – family, friends or wider community.
- Feeling welcome and safe.

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## Question 14: What could we do here?

This question is an opportunity to assess ideas and thoughts on what you think should be kept, changed or added to the high street area. When reviewing these ideas together, divide them into what you think are **needs** and **wants**. The outcomes might be surprising – for example:

- Different shop opening times might be perceived as more of a need than a want.
- Being able to park in a particular place might be more of a convenient want than a need.

Questioning the ideas in this way can help break from convention, offering a more inclusive ways of thinking about change. Challenging and addressing the **wants** that are compromising the **needs** can create a more successful place:

- Increasing hospitality and night-time economy can affect and compromise the development of town centre living.
- Creating pedestrianisation and one-way traffic management schemes can negatively affect accessibility and place character.

Agree key **Themes** with a statement for each one and mark 'Action Areas' on the high street map.

### Additional Prompts

- How do we support people throughout their lives?
- What would make this an attractive place to live?
- How do we increase active movement?
- How do we improve the visitor offer?
- How do we increase activity for trade, work and volunteering?
- How do we increase the sense of safety and welcome?

## **Question 15:** **What could your high street look and feel like?**

This follow-on question is about the quality of place you would like to see created. Think of it as preparing a brief for future designers.

Include thoughts on architecture and landscape design, along with public art, activities and events. Think about the details, textures and colours you like in your place and others you have seen. Consider both traditional and contemporary design examples. Bring images from home, make collages from magazines and access the web to create an ideas scrapbook based on these questions.

The conclusion of this theme should be the production of a collective **Vision Statement** with objectives and goals. This is a vision of what the place could become, based on the needs of this and future generations. The facilitation team can help to interpret and illustrate these ideas.



# Theme Four

## Delivering: how to focus & prioritise



Photo Captions: 1. Street art to create a new sense of place in town centres designed by Daisy Chain Inc, Ballymoney; 2. Multi-layered community events and activities space, CS Lewis Square, Belfast; 3. Active travel on the Belfast Cycle Network, Grosvenor Road, Belfast; 4. Street front parkour engagement event for children and young people, Belfast; 5. Street art to create a new sense of place in town centres designed by Daisy Chain Inc, Limavady

## **Purpose: Developing a shared understanding of how the change process works to support a focussed programme of projects and activities**

The main objective is to develop a **Living High Streets Framework** out of the Vision which will co-ordinate a potentially wide range of actions, activities and unplanned challenges over time. The Framework should include consideration of existing plans and developments, ongoing stewardship activities, alongside the new ideas generated. It may also include consideration of delivery partnerships, budgets, funding sources, business plans etc.

This theme is about filtering ideas by seeing how they could best address the Vision Statement, goals and objectives. Importantly, start with the outputs from the Imagining Theme and develop them into a Project Plan. The resources to deliver it must be looked for based on the agreed Project Plan, not the other way around. This theme differs from the others. The whole community will be involved in shaping the Framework. However, the Local Action Group will be responsible for detailed and ongoing development of the Framework. More skills and resources can be sought for this detailed work from the NI High Street Task Force, local or

central government, NGOs or specialists as well as seeking advice from other Local Action Groups.

It is critical that the Local Action Group keeps everyone informed and involved with key decisions throughout this process.

## **Outcomes and Outputs**

The desired results from this part of the process is a **Living High Streets Framework** of action areas and supporting themes that loosely organise the ideas into a sequence of actions, interventions and activities. Outputs include:

- **Project Plan** – includes the place themes, action areas, physical projects and/or programmes and activities that address the goals and objectives in the Vision Statement using the Ideas Scrapbook.
- **Programme** - a series of Now, Sooner & Later actions.
- **Implementation Plan** - responsibilities, resources needed (skills and funding) and methods.

These should complete the Living High Streets Framework alongside the Vision Statement and Ideas Scrapbook.

## Ways of working together

These **Framework** shaping discussions could be facilitated in a single workshop to draw together the action areas, physical projects and activities that together will create a sustainable implementation plan. A break of at least a week is recommended from Theme three to allow for reflection.

Grouping ideas for projects, activities and programmes can be challenging but will help focus the opportunities that would make a difference. One way is to use Post-it or spider diagrams and plans to map out ideas, photographing each version before moving ideas around. It is unlikely that everything in the Ideas Scrapbook will reach the Project Plan but do not discount good ideas as they may be useful in the future. The Project Plan will benefit from more creative design work but try to stay strategic and not get into the details of specific actions.

The Local Action Group will develop and grow the **Framework** over time to include:

- Strategies – to address area wide changes (movement, public realm, lighting etc.)
- Planning and Development Briefs – to stimulate interest in sites / buildings
- Competitions – to generate and promote ideas (physical, activities, engagement)
- Scheme designs – when ideas and funding are certain
- Funding Applications and Business Plans – to seek and justify resources needed
- Activity programmes – to co-ordinate activities and events
- Volunteering programmes – to extend resources
- Tactical and pop-up opportunities
- Monitoring – measure change, review and refresh

## Question 16: Where could we make changes?

This question is about turning the Vision, Goals and Objectives into a practical Project Plan. While this is a filtering exercise, it is important not to dismiss practical ideas – they may be the only choice down the line. Reviewing the ideas within the Place Themes and Action Areas, draw a simple plan or diagram for change. Look at the ideas in the key themes and think about how they would work together:

- What needs to come first to enable other projects – the catalysts, enablers and activities that prove needs.
- Can be tactical, pop-up, pilot projects and meanwhile uses for buildings and spaces.
- What are the back-up ideas that replace those that do not work?
- Illustrate how connecting themes like movement could pull everything together.

### Additional Prompts

- What kind of changes – landscape, buildings, spaces, landscapes, movement; stewardship?
- What are the hard and soft sites - what is non- negotiable?
- What new spaces are needed and could be created?
- Where could people live – above the shop; new houses; apartments etc.
- Where would new buildings or facilities go?
- How will people move about?
- Consider public arts, events and festivals.



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## Question 17: How do we prioritise actions?

This question is about expanding the Project Plan by creating a Programme of prioritised actions to prove the practicality of the Framework, build confidence and develop trust. The earlier question started the process on what comes first and what comes later. However, places are complex, and things do not always align as we need them to. A programme will provide a management tool that can deal with these difficulties and help keep everything on the agenda:

- What existing initiatives are already committed - how can we complement and enhance them?
- Name actions as projects (e.g., buildings), strategies (e.g., movement) and activities (e.g., markets) etc.
- Think about the changes in terms of challenges, stakeholders, outputs and outcomes etc.
- Accept that funding and capacity will mean that ideas may not all be deliverable at the same time, but do not dismiss ideas because of this.
- Develop the programme as a series of Now, Sooner and Later actions.

### Additional Prompts

- What is the decision-making strategy?
- Where do we put our focus – key themes?
- What is the logical order of things?
- What barriers and risks exist?
- How much resource is there within organisations, partners and collaborators?
- How can we do existing things differently to improve outcomes and confidence?
- What tactical, pop-up or pilot projects could be trialled to evaluate the viability of initiatives, gain traction and support?

## Question 18: How do we deliver action?

The Project Plan and Programme set out **what and when**. This question is about creating an Implementation Plan and asks **who** will be responsible for making a project happen and **how** they will achieve it. Consider the following for all the projects, activities and programmes in the Project Plan:

- Who needs to be involved – do they have the experience, skills and capacity to deliver the tasks?
- The RACI matrix may help find a lead that is responsible, a partnership or a charter that everyone signs up to.
- Where do we find people to fill the gaps?
- Whether we need to commission professional help?
- Empowering alternative groups to deliver sustainable civic leadership and stewardship.
- Would design competitions usefully bring skills to the table?
- How do we form and structure delivery groups or organisations - legal issues, charities, partnership etc.
- What approaches are already working well?
- Value the good things and work on them – celebrate success.
- Are there any good case studies or examples from which we can learn?
- How do we make land / sites / buildings available for change – ownerships, leases, covenants, rights of way etc?
- How do we get best value from existing resources, attract new investment and bid for funding?
- Small ideas can generate their own momentum.

Along with the Project Plan and Programme, the Implementation Plan is the working part of the Living High Streets Framework. All three should be in a continuous state of update, revision and development.

# Theme Five

## Monitoring: confirming progress



Photo Captions: 1, 2, 3 and 5 Stakeholder engagement, Urban Villages  
4. Academy of Urbanism, Derry~Londonderry

## **Purpose: Evaluating outcomes, perceptions, and refreshing outcomes and goals**

The main objective in this theme is evaluating progress and resolving issues. While these are primarily questions for the Local Action Group to address, the wider community will be naturally feeding information into the evaluation process and should be receiving regular updates on progress. Although this is a reality check on progress, it should remain a positive process that looks at successes as well as challenges.

### **Outcomes and Outputs**

The main outcomes will be updates to the Project Plan, Programme and Implementation Plan. Added outputs might include:

- **Framework Update** – naming and communicating key achievements, milestones and level of engagement.
- **Outcomes and Perceptions** – community insights.
- **Risk Register** - showing low, medium and high risks, proposed mitigation, and any implications (governance and leadership, finance, resource, legal etc.)

### **Ways of working together**

The Local Action Group need to keep the wider community informed on progress.

The Framework will also have indicators, developed from the agreed goals, which relate to community perceptions – safety, ease of movement, quality of the environment, business success etc. This data can be collected by surveys, a constant social media presence and from special interest sub-groups working to the Action Group. It would also be useful to hold community meeting periodically to discuss question 19 and other questions that need refreshing in conversation.

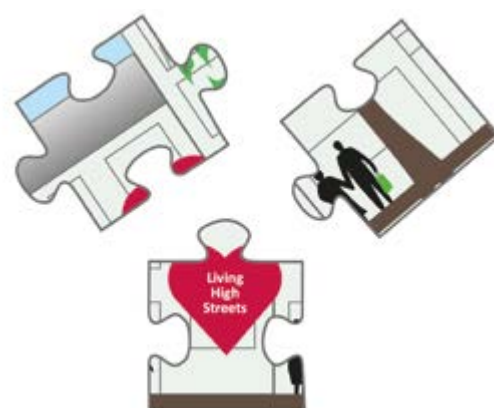
An underestimated part of delivering change is governance and managing capacity, along with available resources. It is important to be realistic about what can be achieved, so do not be afraid to adjust projects, activities and programmes if it will improve outcomes. The Local Action Group should review and rotate their membership and governance to ensure the structure and capacity continues to be appropriate and sustainable. Consider the RACI matrix as part of the review at a Framework level as well as at project and programme level. Take care to balance paid and voluntary inputs to ensure responsibility and recognition are addressed.



## Question 19: How do we know when we have Living High Streets?

This question is about measuring success which will mean different things in separate places. Key to the process will be sharing what worked and what did not work to improve the Framework. Select achievable indicators to match the vision, goals and objectives, remembering to always underpin them with sustainability outcomes. Consider factors like:

- More and different people coming to your Living High Street – do they stay for longer and do more things?
- Increasing sense of safety and belonging along with being inclusive and welcoming.
- More people choosing to live in and around the high street.
- Businesses thriving, diversifying and employing more people.
- Increasing quality of the environment.
- Increasing accessibility and active travel.
- Increasing levels of community wellbeing.
- Additional Prompts
- Is there more happening in your Living High Street now?
- Are you proud of your Living High Street?
- Have you achieved the agreed goals in the Vision?
- Which outcomes are you excelling in?
- Which indicators are you finding more challenging to meet?
- Are there specific barriers to achieving desired outcomes?
- Are there areas in your Living High Street that work well and are there areas that do not work so well?

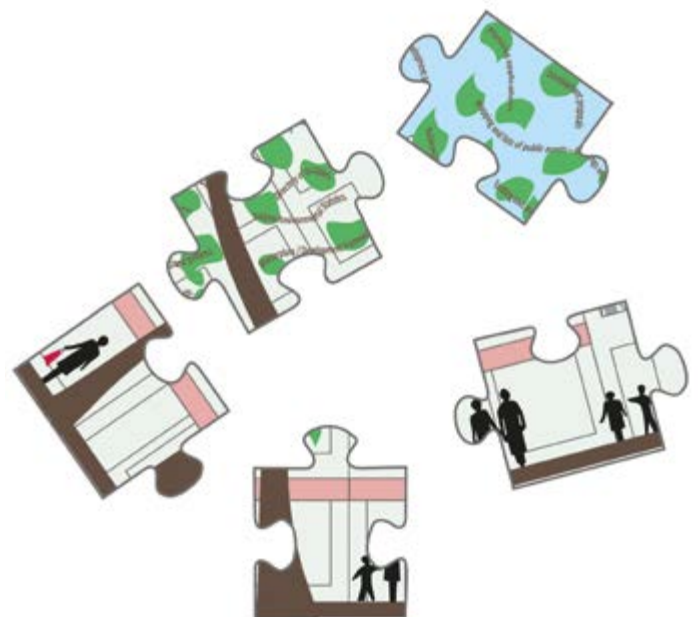


## Question 20: How could the Local Action Group improve the Living High Streets approach?

It is important to monitor the implementation of the Craft Kit and whether it is making the difference it aimed to achieve. Through its use, the Local Action Groups may find gaps or better ways to engage people in discussing their place and planning for the future.

### Consider:

- Its ease of use with all members of the community – was any group excluded?
- Were the community able to develop an effective Framework?
- Was it easy to achieve shared goals and maintain consensus?
- Has it been sustainable and is the community continuing to reflect on the questions?
- What would you do differently or add to the process?



# Theme Six

## Maintaining: loving your place



Photo Captions: 1. Opening celebrations, Colin Connect Transport Hub and Colin Town Square, Belfast; 2. Pop up interventions, Ormeau Road, Belfast; 3. Enjoying the Living High Street, Lisburn Square; 4. Celebrating shop-eat-enjoy week "Back-in-Bangor"; 5. Maintaining colourful places on Dublin Road, Omagh

**Purpose: Staying focused, maintaining ambition, keeping everybody involved and celebrating success**

The main objective of this theme is to keep the co-producing process alive and well. Maintaining momentum has its own challenges including capacity, time, skills, energy and funding. Confidence is expected to increase through the process, and it is important to reflect on people's increased ability to influence at various levels.

Communication will continue to be critical using traditional and digital formats along with local ambassadors who can be powerful advocates and promoters for your Living High Street. These may be self-selected volunteers or those employed to represent the place.

Competitions are an effective way to engage with everyone. These could range from photography to flower and produce shows, community festivals and local events or urban orienteering activities like URBINGO. These

competitions could link with nearby towns, villages or communities. It is important to celebrate successes throughout the place change process which can be marked in many ways.

Awards can be set up to recognise and celebrate inspirational champions of local life and their communities. Categories should reflect the place and their community and might include tidy town, best dressed street or shopfront, high street hero, place leader, children and young people achievements etc. They do not necessarily need to have financial rewards. Sharing experiences has benefits at both a local and regional scale. It strengthens community capacity by sharing skills, learning and up-skilling the whole community. 'Bonding social capital' will benefit individuals and the local community. Sharing and exchanging knowledge and experience should be encouraged between different Local Action Groups. Some skills transfer training could evolve into social enterprises.

## Question 21: How do we ensure our Living High Streets lasts?

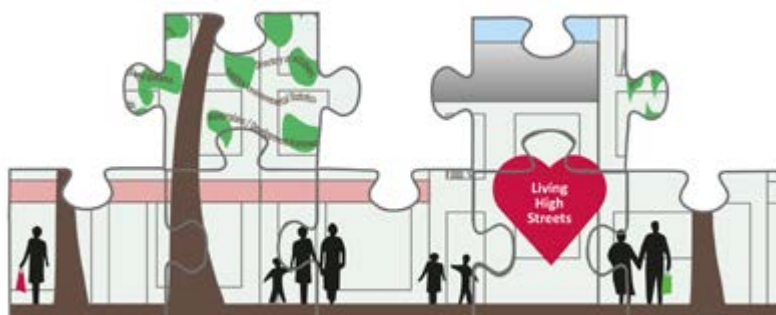
This question is about staying focused and relevant. Like any plan, it is important to guard against mission drift or allow stronger voices to dominate the process. Maintaining your Living High Streets will need continual nurturing and refreshing. Consider how to keep the community:

- Engaged in the process – recognise that the community will change over time.
- Inspired to take part in delivering projects, stewardship and activities.
- Planning for future projects and programmes.

It will be important to reflect on what has worked and what you would like to see in the future. Everyone should have a stake in their Living High Streets, and it is important to continue reflecting on shared interests. This will keep them relevant and in people's minds. New people may bring fresh ideas or have diverse needs. For example, the community may develop an older or younger demographic, have more people choosing urban living or a visitor economy may grow.

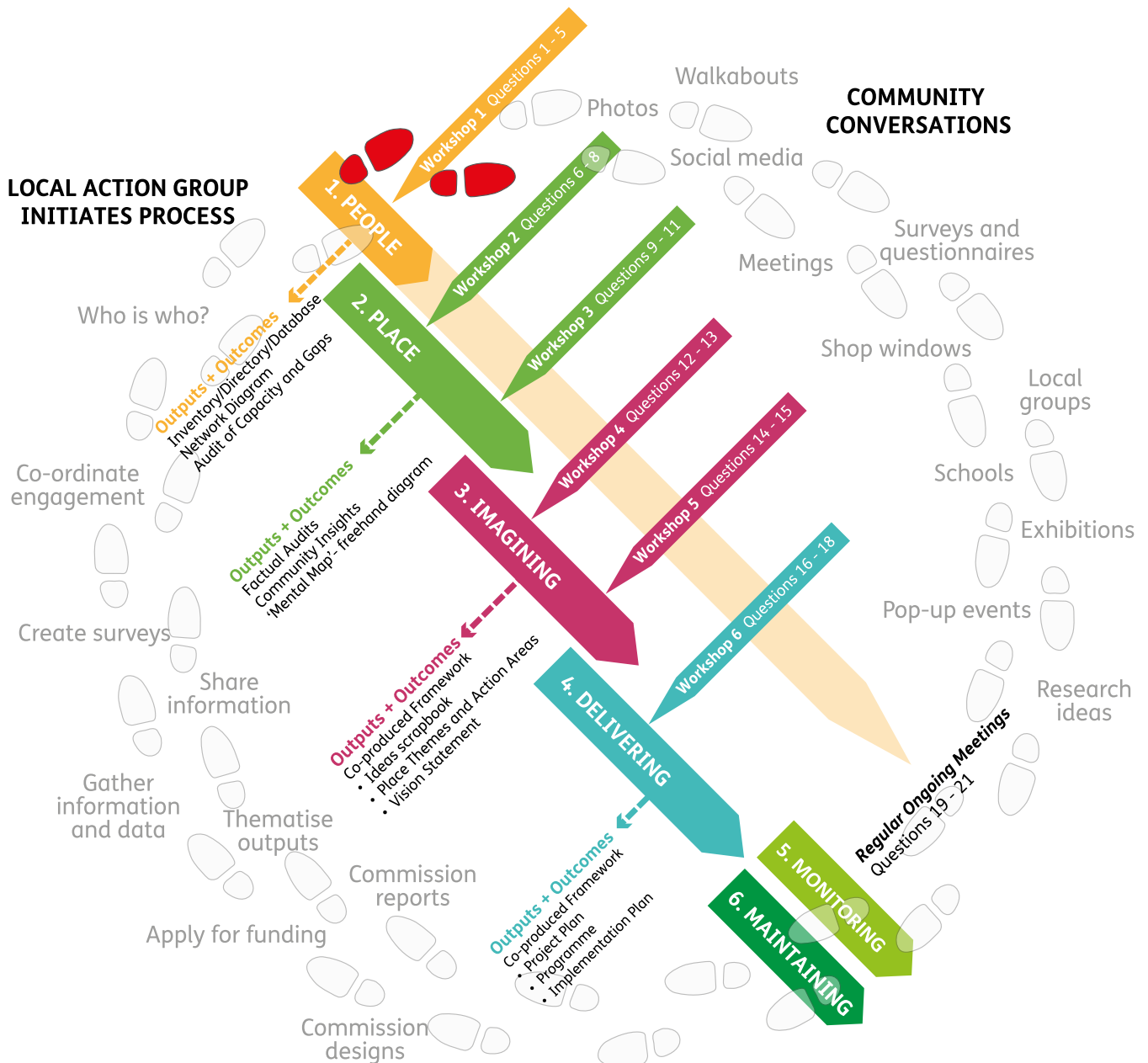
### Consider:

- How the Framework will be updated?
- How can we generate revenue funding?
- What we can share with other Local Action Groups and what can we learn from them?



# The Craft Kit in Action

While the themes work in sequence, there will also be natural overlaps and necessary feedback. The workshops, outputs and outcomes are core activities, and will be supported by a wider range of activities within the community alongside essential tasks with the Local Action Group.



# Appendices

## **Compiling the Living High Streets Craft Kit**

The Living High Streets Craft Kit was produced through a co-design process that involved many different individuals from the Government Departments and High Streets Task Force within Northern Ireland. This extensive process and the production of this document were facilitated and developed by MAG on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC) and its team who wish to thank all those involved in this collaboration:

- Belfast Healthy Cities
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
- Department for Communities (DfC)
- Department for the Economy (DE)
- Department of Finance (DoF)
- Department for Infrastructure (DfI)
- Department of Justice (DoJ)
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE NI)
- The Executive Office (TEO)
- The Strategic Investment Board (SIB)

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